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THE NEW TESTAMENT OF 1611, AS A TRANSLATION

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Everyone has felt the force and charm of the King James Version. The vigor, dignity, and simplicity of its language have made for it a notable place in English literature, while its continued use for three hundred years has freighted almost every phrase of it with a wealth of lofty and sacred associations. Not only is it an English classic, but it has well served the religious needs of ten generations of readers and hearers.

But in the New Testament the revisers of 1611 had a text by no means identical with that which now prevails. The character and deficiencies of that text are treated in another article. We are here concerned with the use they made of it. It is generally held that at just this point the companies of 1611 were at their best. Their Old Testament text was, we are told, nearly as good as ours, but they were a little weak as Hebraists; the Greek text on which they had to base their New Testament, on the other hand, was corrupt, but their Greek scholarship was excellent. That is, in the Old Testament they made poor use of a good text; in the New, they made good use of a poor text. Whether this bold generalization holds true of the Old Testament or not, it fairly summarizes the situation for the New and, in general, where our modern renderings of the New Testament depart seriously from the King James Version, a corrected Greek text will be found at the bottom of the change.

Given the undoubtedly inferior Greek text, however, upon which alone the Oxford and Westminster companies of 1611 had to build, what shall be said of their work? A willing mind should be as they themselves put it, "accepted according to that a man hath and not according to that he hath not." Did they deal skilfully and faithfully with the text they had? It is of course true that not all that we find in our Authorized Version originated

with them. They sought to preserve wherever possible the language of the Bishops' Bible (1568), of which they may be regarded as the revisers. But the renderings which they took over from it and those which they themselves originated are both, though in different senses, their own.¹

One of the first matters to be observed in examining the King James Version somewhat closely is its freedom. Its producers were not hampered by a false notion that a Greek word or construction must always be represented by the same English equivalent. In this they were obviously right. Indeed, they rather sought variety in translation. It was doubtless this in part which gave to their version its naturalness and vigor. Some examples of this are instructive. The word *δέ* is rendered "now," "then," "but," "and," or is even omitted. The word *οἰκοδεσπότης* is translated "master of the house" (3 times), "householder" (4 times), and "goodman of the house" (5 times). The word *ἐξαυτῆς* is rendered "immediately" (3 times), "straightway" (once), "presently" (once), and "by and by" (once: Mark 6:25). This last case seems a toning down to suit the context. The treatment of *γίνομαι*, often so difficult to translate, is varied. "There was a cry made" (*κραυγὴ γέγρονεν*, Matt. 25:6); "till all these things be fulfilled" (*ἕως ἂν πάντα ταῦτα γένηται*, Matt. 24:34). Other meanings are "be," "fall," "be ordained to be," "come," "be done," "come to pass," "become," "be shewed," "be wrought," "grow," "arise," "be brought." Two or three of these are perhaps overtranslations, but in general they only show the flexibility and vigor of the translators' English, and the soundness of their English feeling. Yet their treatment of certain words is not altogether easy to understand. The noun *ἀγάπη*, for example, is steadily rendered "charity" in I Cor., chap. 13, where it appears nine times. The same word occurs eighteen times in I John, where it is always rendered "love," and this is the prevailing word for it in the Version. Doubtless this apparent inconsistency is in part explained by the fact that the word charity had a

¹ It must not be forgotten that the Authorized Version was more than once modified in details, in the eighteenth century, and, as it appears in modern copies, differs very much in spelling, and somewhat in the use of italics, from the edition of 1611.

different content in 1611 from any now connected with it. Certainly there are instances ("penny" for denarius, "filthy lucre," etc.) where English speech has quite grown away from the phraseology of 1611, leaving it misleading or meaningless.

A similar freedom characterizes the treatment of tenses in the King James Version. The graphic presents (*παραλαμβάνεται, ἀφίεται*) of Matt. 24:40, 41 are rendered by futures: "the one shall be taken, and the other left." This translation is reasonable enough, although the Greek might have been more closely imitated. The aorist *ἔκρυψε* is translated by the present in Matt. 13:44 ("the which when a man hath found, he hideth"), being treated as gnomic under the influence of the following presents; but probably all these tenses are historical. In Matt. 25:8, "our lamps are gone out" does not translate the present *σβέννυνται*, "go out" or "are going out"; indeed, here the version of 1611 gives quite a different picture from the Greek. The imperfect *ἐκάλουν* in Luke 1:59 certainly does not mean "they called"; in the connection that sense would have required the aorist, and the child was not actually named Zacharias. The imperfect is progressive: they were about to name him Zacharias, indeed, in the very act of doing so, when the mother intervened. "I am ready to be offered" does not at all convey the present *σπένδομαι* in II Tim. 4:6. For Paul the libation has begun; he is now being poured out. In Heb. 2:16 both tense and meaning of *ἐπιλαμβάνεται* are lost in the translation. This misapprehension or neglect of the present tense shows itself most seriously in the translators' frequent disregard of the historical present so characteristic of the Gospel of Mark. By rendering this by a past tense, the King James companies often obscured the primitive vigor and freshness of that gospel.

The treatment of proper names deserves mention. *Νῶε* is Noe in the gospels, Noah in the epistles. It will be remembered that the gospels were translated by an Oxford company, the epistles by one at Westminster, and the combined companies revised the whole. But this will not explain Jeremy (Matt. 2:17; 27:9) and Jeremias (Matt. 16:14), against the Jeremiah of the Old Testament translators. Timothy is Timotheus 17 times, Timothy 7

times. In II Cor., chap. 1, both forms are used. Esaias, Zacharias, Elias, Eliseus, Jonas are transferences from the Greek, uninfluenced by the forms of these names which appear in the King James Old Testament. The Zion of the Old Testament translators is in the New Testament everywhere Sion, of course under the influence of the Greek spelling *Σιών*. The Italian villages Appii Forum and Tres Tabernae (Acts 28:15) were treated differently: the first was transferred in its Latin form, the second was translated into English, "the three Taverns." The revisers (1881) have translated both into English, and it would seem that both should be either English or Latin. The word "hell" in the King James Version does duty for a variety of Greek expressions. It is used for Hades (*ᾗδου*), Tartarus (in *ταρταρώσας*, II Peter 2:4) and Gehenna (*γέεννα*). Thus the "fiery Gehenna" of Matt. 5:22 becomes "hell fire" in the King James Version. In this the Jacobean translators too readily assumed that those three expressions were identical in meaning, and exceeded their proper function as translators. "Cyrenius" in Luke 2:2 should really have been "Quirinius"; but here, as in the names of the prophets, the translators were simply transliterating a Greek form. The use of "Easter" for "Passover" (*Πάσχα*) in Acts 12:4, however, is very near an anachronism, to say the least. "Castor and Pollux," the name and figurehead of the ship on which Paul reached Italy (Acts 28:11), is a natural expansion of Dioscuri (*Διόσκουροι*). Even the revisers hesitated to carry this word over into English, which would seem the natural course with the name of a ship, and have translated "the Twin Brothers." The Greeks called these demigods Castor and Polydeuces; in substituting the Latin form Pollux the translators of 1611 follow their usual procedure: Diana for Artemis, Jupiter for Zeus, Mercury for Hermes, etc. Yet they retained the confusing "Jesus" (*Ἰησοῦς*) for Joshua in Acts 7:45, Heb. 4:8, adhering to the Greek form in preference to the familiar Old Testament one.

The definite article often presents great difficulty to the English translator, and it is no wonder that the treatment of it in the King James Version is sometimes open to question. The translators omitted in Matt. 1:23: "A virgin (*ἡ παρθένος*) shall be with child;"

supplied it in Acts 17:23: "To the unknown God" (ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ); and curiously distorted it in Heb. 12:2—where it is really generic, and should be omitted—by introducing "*our*" in its place: "the author and finisher of *our* faith." The use of the article for the possessive is as old as Homer, but the italics show that the translators did not think the "*our*" a translation of the article. Indeed, they did not recognize the possessive use in Mark 13:28, translating "Now from the fig tree learn a parable" (τὴν παραβολήν). Here the Revisers' "her parable" is better. A corresponding disregard of the absence of the article, as in Acts 17:23 above, occasionally appears: "God . . . hath . . . spoken unto us by a son" (Heb. 1:1, 2) is truer to the precision of the Greek than the King James "by *his* son." The absence of the article from πνεῦμα ἅγιον is often disregarded by the old translators, who render "the Holy Ghost" quite uniformly. Indeed, almost every principle concerning the use of the article and of the noun without the article is more than once traversed by the King James Version.

The article presents peculiar difficulty in connection with words which are sometimes appellative and sometimes proper names. A simple example is ὁ Σεβαστός, "the Augustus," R.V., "the emperor" (Acts 25:21, 25). The King James Version renders this as a proper name, "Augustus," which at once suggests the first emperor, not the fifth. Every emperor bore this title among others, but as an appellative; and it might quite properly have been rendered "the Augustus" or more freely, "the emperor." Vastly greater difficulty attends the treatment of ὁ Χριστός, "Christ," "the Christ," which is sometimes a proper name, sometimes an appellative. The King James Version quite certainly takes the wrong alternative in translating it as a proper name in Acts 26:23: "That Christ should suffer."

There are some awkwardnesses of translation in the King James Version which, with a better understanding of Greek idiom, might have been avoided: "A man that is an householder" (Matt. 13:52) and "a man which am a Jew" (Acts 21:39) are circumlocutions for which neither Greek text nor English feeling gives any real warrant. Other eccentricities of rendering: "But and if" (ἐὰν δέ, Matt. 24:48); "No, nor" (οὐδ' οὐ μή, Matt. 24:22);

"No, not" (οὐδέ, Matt. 24:36); "No, nor yet" (ἀλλ' οὐδέ, Luke 23:15); "the said Herodias" (αὐτῆς τῆς Ἡρωδιάδος, Mark 6:22); "To whom our fathers would not obey" (Acts 7:39)—are doubtless mainly due to an English feeling from which our modern speech has grown away. The woman's assenting answer "Truth, Lord" (Ναὶ, κύριε, Matt. 15:27) is of the same character.

It is not unnatural, even in so excellent a version, to find an occasional inexactness in particulars. "Generation of vipers" hardly does justice to the plural γεννήματα (broods) ἐχιδνῶν in Matt. 3:7. "Temple" is hardly the word for οἶκος (sanctuary) in Luke 11:51: "which perished between the altar and the temple" (A.V.). "Spirit" is not the best equivalent for φάντασμα (Matt. 14:26); but perhaps it was, in 1611, for the American Revision's "It is a ghost" suggests that "ghost" and "spirit" have exchanged functions since then.

There are, finally, certain positive mistranslations in the King James Version. "Let him be Anathema Maranatha" (I. Cor. 16:22) is a strange blending of Greek and Aramaic, of curse and promise. Ignorance of the terse Aramaic expression Maran-atha ("The Lord comes"; or Marana-tha, "Come, Lord!") has converted a touching watchword of the early church into a meaningless appendix to the apostolic curse. The measures taken by the mariners in Acts 27:40 are quite misrepresented in the King James; it was the anchors, not themselves, that they committed to the sea. "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Acts 26:28) is hardly a mistranslation; but it has at least lent itself to misunderstanding and misuse. In I Cor. 13:1 the apostle's metaphor, "I am become sounding brass," has been altered to a simile: "I am become as sounding brass." The expressions "men and brethren" (Acts 13:26; 23:1; 28:17) and "Men, brethren and fathers" (Acts 22:1) misrepresent the force of ἄνδρες with ἀδελφοὶ or ἀδελφοὶ καὶ πατέρες; where, as in ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, ἄνδρες imparts a certain courtesy and dignity to the address, but is hardly capable of separate translation.

But it is a needless and a thankless task to point out further small defects in a work so intelligently and thoroughly done. Certainly

Greek lexicography and syntax are better understood in 1911 than they were three centuries ago. The genetic study of syntax, with its roots in Sanskrit and its ramifications in Latin and in Byzantine and Modern Greek, has brought substantial results to New Testament study and promises still more. The reduction of classical, biblical, and patristic vocabularies to accessibility through concordances and indices, so fundamental for a scientific lexicography, brilliantly undertaken by Estienne (Stephanus) in the sixteenth century, has only in the last generation been seriously resumed and is hardly more than under way. The papyri and inscriptions are only beginning to be largely drawn upon for biblical research. Without such method and materials in syntax and lexicography it is not strange that the King James translators sometimes stumbled. Rather, it is wonderful that they achieved a version so apt, precise, and lasting.